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FURTHER VIEWS OF PENSION LIST REVISION.

BY WHEELOCK G. VEAZEY, PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF
THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC; REPRESENTATIVE
O'NEIL, OF MASSACHUSETTS ; AND REPRESENTATIVE
ENLOE, OF TENNESSEE.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF VEAZEY:

I CAN write upon the pension question only from the stand-point of the deepest sympathy with my comrades in the Army throughout the war. I saw them break from the ties and endearments of home and undergo the discomforts, the hardships, and the perils of soldier life in the field; I saw them in the great stress and strain of campaigns, on the long and exhausting march, in heat and cold and storm, weary, hungry, foot-sore, sick, no couch at night but the ground, no covering between them and the clouds ; I saw them on the night watch, sleepless, faithful, vigilant ; I saw them engaging in battle after battle with bravery equal to any duty or order, receiving wounds and meeting death without murmur or complaint. Amid these scenes the question often came to me : Will the country appreciate and remember what it owes to its defenders ? Memory of what I then saw and thought has not faded with time. Admiration and sympathy have only increased. Pledges then made to the soldiers have to me become more sacred as the years pass. They seem to me to be more sacred than the pledges to creditors of the Republic, which I am glad have been honestly redeemed. I have never favored proposed pension legislation based on the idea of compensation for the service of the veterans. All the mines of earth do not contain sufficient of gold and silver and gems for that. The patriotism that inspired true soldiers must not have a price put upon it or be considered as having a money value. The pledge to them was in substance that neither they nor those dependent upon them should be allowed to suffer

from physical misfortunes and distresses. I believe it is the abiding conviction of the people as a whole that this pledge shall be faithfully redeemed. No political party can afford to violate it. Individuals may grumble and threaten, but the masses will be sound and firm. The pension roll may be large, but that is because the army was large, the war long continued, the campaigns severe and frequent.

The original pension laws occasioned by the war were framed on the principle of pensioning every soldier whose infirmity could be traced to his service as the cause. After twenty-nine years from the beginning of the war had elapsed, Congress enlarged the scope of pension legislation by providing in effect that a *present* disability to perform manual labor should entitle a veteran to a pension, if applied for under that particular act, without tracing the cause to his military service, the amount to be determined by the measure of his disability, but in no case to exceed twelve dollars per month. The argument was that after such lapse of time it had become impossible to prove the cause if it originated in the service; and, further, if it occurred since, a pension to one having a present physical disability to labor would be but a just fulfilment of the pledge as it was fairly understood when the enlistments took place; that it had never been the thought of the people that the volunteers of the war should become public paupers by reason of physical disability to labor for bread to eat or clothes to wear. This was the liberal interpretation which a patriotic Congress gave to what it conceived to be the fairly implied promise to the soldiers. No future Congress will ever recede from it.

Some provision may be necessary to cure past or prevent future frauds upon the law. Undoubtedly some men have obtained pensions by imposition and falsehood. Remedial statutes are seldom enacted under which fraud is not attempted and sometimes perpetrated. Amendments for the better administration of this law may become necessary, but its general provisions will never be narrowed. If radical changes occur, they will be on the line of even greater liberality, the same as we have seen in behalf of the surviving soldiers of the Mexican War.

The charge sometimes made that the old soldiers have been importunate in their demands for pensions is false if applied to them as a body. They have often been advised to make inordi-

nate demands, and have often been told that the Government has been unjust to them, and that there is no limit to their just dues ; but this is the inconsiderate and extravagant talk of the enthusiast or the demagogue. The veterans as a class have made no unreasonable demands ; they have asked only what would be just, in view, not of their service, which they freely gave to the country in crushing rebellion and preserving the Union, but of their physical disabilities to earn a livelihood.

There was a difference of opinion as to the form of legislation best calculated to reach this result. Some thought it should be in the form of a service pension ; that is, a pension to all; but graduated in amount to each according to length of service. It was claimed that this would operate more justly than the present law, and would not be an abandonment of the disability idea, because practically all were more or less disabled by the strain and severity of the service ; but, after painstaking investigation by Congressional committees, the act of 1890 was adopted. This act must result in entitling nearly all Union soldiers to a pension sooner or later, because all who escape death by acute disease or accident will naturally reach a condition of partial or total disability to perform manual labor.

Some complain of this statute because it covers the cases of those who, though physically infirm, are yet above pecuniary want. The complaint may not be wholly without force, but to make this distinction between classes would violate all precedent. Pension legislation has never favored discrimination on the score of difference in the financial ability of persons. The difficulty of securing pension laws that operate with exact justice in all cases is about as great as that encountered in framing just tax laws. Objection has always been made to compelling an applicant for a pension to prove his financial dependency or poverty as a requisite. The impression exists among those who have administered the law of 1890 that the percentage of pensioners thereunder of any considerable means is small. I have reason to believe that this is so, and, further, that the percentage of fraudulent pensioners is not large, but I agree that the law should contain such provisions as are necessary to guard against impositions.

I am not prepared to say that a better enactment than that of June, 1890, as supplementary to previous laws, could not have been passed, but having carefully watched its administration and

beneficial effects for nearly two years I think much better of it now than when it was passed, and should oppose any change that would infringe its principle. Adhere to that, but cure defects in details if the enactment has any, would be my advice. The amount of the pension roll is large, and more than some anticipated, and is likely to increase somewhat, but the advanced age of the veterans is conclusive assurance that the increase will be of short duration, and that the decrease will then be rapid.

The fact, now well established by experts, that the severe strain and great exposure largely diminished the physical resources of all soldiers who served any considerable term, should not be overlooked. This alone is sufficient to establish the soundness of the principle upon which the act of 1890 was based. That law was founded on the idea before indicated, not to pay a man for what he did as a soldier, as no amount of compensation would be adequate for that, but to give him something for that diminution of physical power to earn bread which his service caused ; and for the reasons above suggested the law further provided that present disability should be sufficient to establish the right to a pension. It was a generous enactment, and this the people demanded ; and if it failed to work exact and equal justice in all cases, it was a fault that could not well be obviated without great danger of denying relief in many worthy and proper cases, which were embraced by the principle on which the act was framed.

WHEELOCK G. VEAZEY.

HON. JOSEPH H. O'NEIL:

THOSE who advocate a reform in the pension system are in favor of good pensions to people who deserve and need them, but as at present administered the system has placed patriotism at a discount ; it has debauched the loyal sentiments of most of the survivors of our great war for human liberty and it has reduced the treasury of the country to an almost bankrupt condition.

The demand for a reformation of the system comes just as heartily and sincerely from the real soldiers of the last war as it does from those thirty millions of people who have come upon the stage since, for they can see that the glory of the great achievements of that war is being dimmed and over-shadowed, its

great and far-reaching results forgotten in the grand scramble now apparently being made to get as much as possible out of the government.

The scramble is not being made by the men who did most of the fighting, but by the camp-followers, the coffee-coolers and the bummers, who reflected on the good name of the real soldier during the war and who now by their unceasing demands for more pensions are endangering the pensions of the worthy and deserving.

Every man wounded or diseased in the service should receive a pension commensurate with such wounds or disease, and no one from one end of the country to the other would say him nay. No man who wore the blue should want for bread. This the country has said in repeated acts of legislation, and in it all concur. Were the male pensioners on the list confined to those two classes, the amount of money required for the payment of the whole pension roll would not exceed \$100,000,000, and yet the present Congress has appropriated \$165,000,000, or more than one-third of the total revenue of the country. The Commissioner of Pensions asked for \$172,000,000, and it is conceded by those who have investigated the matter that if the pension bureau is conducted in the same manner under Mr. Cleveland's administration as under Mr. Harrison's, with a desire to give a pension to every possible claimant under the law, the amount needed will be at least \$190,000,000. Unless a halt be called it will soon reach the enormous total of \$250,000,000, or one-half of the total expenses of the government.

The recent attempt by the National House of Representatives to secure some reform in the pension system was hailed with satisfaction all over the country, not only by those who never served in the army or navy during the war but by those veterans who went into the contest from motives of patriotism and who hang their heads now when they see the way in which the pension roll is being disgraced.

There is no doubt that for the first ten or fifteen years after the war the number of people who were placed on the pension roll undeservedly was very small; the same test that is used in all other countries was applied, and no man's name was placed thereon unless he could show by indisputable evidence that he suffered from wounds received, or disease contracted in, the service. The

proofs required were very strict, and while fraudulent cases existed, their number was very small indeed.

That the country can and will pay these enormous amounts if absolutely necessary no one disputes ; that a growing public sentiment exists that people are drawing pensions who are not entitled to them is not denied ; that if this country became engaged in another war it could not afford to keep up such an enormous pension roll no one attempts to controvert. But while we sneer at those countries which are forced to maintain great standing armies, we are to-day paying more for pensions than any country in Europe does to maintain its military efficiency.

The whole history of the pension system since 1862 is interesting. Take the act granting artificial limbs to those losing an arm or a leg in the service. It was an act properly passed to give as good a substitute as man could make for the lost limbs. Later it was found that men who had not lost their limbs were compelled to wear surgical appliances and an act was passed to furnish them. Later, because it was claimed that the artificial limb makers recommended by the government did not furnish the best limbs, the law was amended so that the maimed soldier could receive the money as commutation and get the limb where he pleased. Then men whose arms or legs were shattered by bullets were declared to be as worthy of this commutation, their limbs being useless, as were those whose limbs were amputated. After this those whose limbs were destroyed by rheumatism demonstrated that their limbs were as useless as those whose limbs were shattered or amputated and they too came forward and demanded commutation and received it. Of course, during all this time the pensions had been gradually increased to meet the degree of their disability, so that the man whose arm is absolutely disabled from rheumatism now draws under the law \$50 commutation every three years, as does the man who lost his arm in battle. So with the man whose leg has become paralyzed ; he, too, draws \$75 every three years, like the man who is obliged to buy an artificial limb.

In the same way have grown the laws in relation to other pensions. The laws, if strictly enforced, require that no pension shall be paid except while the disability exists. It frequently happens that during certain seasons a man is incapacitated for work ; a strict compliance with the law would give him a pension only

during that season ; but through the prodigality born of extravagant expenditures this has been considered too small a matter to look after, and one examination now, if passed successfully, entitles a man to a pension for life, and any attempt to take it away from him calls down on the head of the reformer the names of "rebel" and "copperhead." Yet, during General Grant's administration, pensions were not only reduced and suspended, but pensioners were required under the law to be examined at least once in two years and to pay for their own examination ; yet no one questioned General Grant's friendship for the soldier.

But the system has changed since then and so has the character of the pensioners. In those days very few men were placed on the roll who did not deserve and need pensions. The patriotic spirit which induced men to leave their homes was not then extinct, and they scorned to ask compensation from the government they served for themselves as well as for posterity. But as the old guard died away and the ranks of the 360,000 dead on southern fields were increased by recruits from their wounded and diseased comrades, the skulkers who had suffered neither hardships, danger nor disease, became more powerful numerically, and they began to clamor for their rights, more liberal pensions, back pensions, re-rating laws and service pensions regardless of the question whether pensions were deserved or needed.

General Garfield believed the limit had been reached in 1880, yet for the year 1884 Congress appropriated three times the amount appropriated in his day.

Another and a growing abuse is the granting of pensions to widows. There can be no dispute as to the fact that originally pensions were intended for those widows whose husbands were killed during the war. The State of Massachusetts passed an act in 1864 granting bounties to soldiers who enlisted, and providing that if killed in the service their widows should be paid twenty dollars a month for six months only.

It is an indisputable fact that for years after the war no pension was granted to a widow unless she had been married before the close of the war, but this ruling, like all others, was broadened by prodigal acts of legislation, so that women whose husbands received a pension under the laws passed previous to 1890 can, if married previous to 1886, secure a pension of \$12 a month, even though the husband when alive only drew \$2 a month. If any

pensioner lives till 1939, and then marries, even then his widow will receive a pension of \$8 a month.

The treasury could stand this policy if the people could not, while the former had a surplus, but it is almost a certainty that a deficiency will stare Congress in the face for 1894, and it becomes manifest that something must be done, somewhere, to relieve the people. There can be no reduction of tax burdens unless there shall be first made a reduction in the annual expenditures. That reduction should be made by cutting off unnecessary expenditures. Gratuities should be dispensed with and the actual obligations only of the government kept. The largest amount of gratuities is dispensed in the shape of pensions. The whole system should be revised, and placed on a basis of the actual pledges made when the government was in danger. The country should throw off its present debauched state in regard to pensions, and see to it that those only who deserve and who need pensions should receive them. The law in force previous to 1867 should be revived, so that no pension should be paid to any man under the dependent act of 1890 doing the work and receiving the salary of an able-bodied man in the Government service, nor to any man who is capable of earning his own living.

Pensions should be paid only to widows of soldiers who married previous to the close of the war, and who suffered cares and anxieties in common with their husbands. All but a small portion of the pensions paid to inmates of homes should be taken from them unless the balance be turned over to dependent relatives. These inmates of homes are housed, clothed and fed ; they have many comforts that people in the ordinary walks of life never enjoy ; the privilege of living in those homes with its comforts gives to them much more than the pensioner outside enjoys for like disability.

With the enormous growth of the pension system nearly every one admits that something must be done. The veteran deservedly pensioned cries out against the disgrace of being on the same roll with the bummers, the coffee-coolers and camp-followers who never went into a battle ; the latter cry out that the soldiers served the country and the country ought to be willing to pay pensions liberally, and object to the few large pensions paid to a few officers and officers' widows. The widows who sent their husbands to battle for the Union feel justly aggrieved at

being placed on the same basis as the woman who married twenty-five years after the war was over, and who, maybe, was not born till after Appomattox ; the latter declares she is entitled to a pension because she nursed her husband in his last illness. Each class has its excuse for being, and nearly all admit that the octopus must be cut somewhere, but cry out against the line being drawn on them.

A distinguished Republican ex-Governor of Massachusetts has said that President Cleveland displayed more courage in his pension vetoes than in his tariff message, for he knew where the country stood on the latter but not on the former.

The same heroic courage must be displayed now ; that display should come from the same patriotic citizens who in 1861 and 1862 left their homes and occupations with no thought but their country's good ; from them should come a revival of the old spirit of '61 and a call on all the veterans of the war to purge the list.

They owe it to themselves to do this as well as to their country and the deserving and needy veteran ; if pensions should be confined to the classes mentioned, with the law of 1890 modified and all laws strictly in force, the expenditures for 1894 would be twenty millions less than in 1893. There would be a much larger reduction made in 1895 and in three years the expenditures would be reduced to one hundred millions. Then when those with no claim on the government bounty have been dropped from the list, as the pensioners grow older and more feeble, their pensions may be increased to meet their necessities, for a grateful country will never violate its pledges, nor allow those who patriotically responded to her call in her hour of trial to want for bread.

JOSEPH H. O'NEIL.

HON. B. A. ENLOE :

WE HAVE a pension roll carrying nearly one million names, and there are still pending before the Pension Bureau over one million claims. The expenditures for the next fiscal year will approximate to \$200,000,000. These facts, stripped of details, are sufficient to challenge public attention ; and to at once suggest the necessity for a careful study of the pension question with a view to reforming the abuses of the system. The Commissioner of Pensions has estimated the number of enlisted men in the Union armies from 1861 to 1865 at 2,300,000.

He says that 1,200,000 of these are still living. His report shows 687,862 pensioned as invalids, and 442,326 claiming pensions as invalids. That would give us 1,130,188 disabled, or claiming to be disabled, in a pensionable degree. We must therefore infer that only 69,812 of all that immense army are now living and free from pensionable disabilities. It is estimated that 199,000 deserted and lost their pensionable status.

The records show that 449,315 were drafted, and that 58,843 enlisted as substitutes. Neither gratitude nor contract entitles these men to pensions. Adding the drafted men, the substitutes and the deserters together, we have 707,158 to deduct from the volunteer army as not legitimate claimants on the gratitude of the Republic. Supposing the same proportion of each class to have survived, we should deduct from the 1,200,000 survivors a fraction less than one-third, say in round numbers 360,000 as not entitled to pensions. That would leave 840,000 to occupy a pensionable status, and would indicate that there are many unworthy pensioners on the rolls, or that we have already pensioned all who are legally entitled.

To revise the pension list we should undo the wrongs which have been done, both in the making and in the execution of the laws. The pension is a gratuity, not a matter of contract, and the government has the right, at any time, to change the amount of the pension or to withhold it. The President has it in his power to reform the abuses and to correct the wrongs which are due to the failure to properly execute the law. The Commissioner of Pensions is responsible to the Secretary of the Interior, and the Secretary is responsible to the President, but as neither the Secretary nor the President can possibly have knowledge of the details of administration in that bureau, they must rely on the Commissioner. The man who may be selected to preside over a bureau, which directs the disbursement of one-third of the revenues of the government, should be great enough to rank with the members of the Cabinet, both in ability and in character. He should be honest and able, and courageous enough to do his duty with an eye single to the public weal. He should be a judge of law and imbued with all the qualities of an honest judge; so that he would administer the law without fear or favor.

If the Board of Pension Appeals is to be continued to review his decisions, it should be composed of men of known ability and

integrity, men who could not be approached by the "pension sharks." The secretary should see to it that the decisions of the Board are in accord with the statutes. The medical referee should be eminent in his profession and qualified to govern the important board over which he presides. The local medical boards should be abolished and competent medical examiners should be sent out from the Pension Office to examine applicants. Special examiners in the field are not allowed to serve in the States from which they are appointed, and yet in the important matter of medical examinations the boards are composed of men who must examine their neighbors and often their patrons, with their bills for professional services too often depending on the rating given the applicant. Complaints are frequently made against these boards on the ground that members of them use their positions, not only for political purposes, but to reward friends and to punish enemies.

The entire machinery of the Pension Bureau should be reconstructed, so that it would move in perfect harmony with the will of the Commissioner. It should be lifted out of the ruts in which it has been running, and freed from the domination of the rings formed in it to promote the interests of the pension attorneys. Its files, instead of being subject to the inspection of every clerk, and to everybody who may seek access to them, should be as sacred as the files of the War Department, or of any other department of the Government. If the Commissioner construes the law correctly, and is sustained in it, he will unsettle thousands of claims which have been allowed in violation of law. The erroneous, if not dishonest, rulings of the Board of Pension Appeals on many questions will be reversed. The examination of the admitted files should follow. The Commissioner should detail a commission of pension experts from his office and have every case in the admitted files re-examined and decided in conformity with the law. Those claims which may be found to have been improperly allowed should be rejected, and the names of the pensioners dropped from the roll. This would cut off those who were pensioned under the Act of June 27, 1890, in violation of the law, and of the orders of the Secretary of the Interior. It would cut off the deserters and the men who were dishonorably discharged. It would cut off those who were pensioned under the old law for dis-

abilities resulting from injuries received while in the service, but not in the line of military duty. The application of the ordinary rules of evidence to the cases in the admitted files would also cause the rejection of a large number of claims.

The Commissioner, if in his power, should make public, in printed form, lists of pensioners, arranged by post-offices, and have such lists put up in every post-office in the United States, accompanied by a request to all persons having knowledge of any pension improperly granted to communicate the facts to the Commissioner of Pensions. These lists should give the name of the pensioner, the company and regiment in which he served, the disability on account of which the pension was granted and the amount of the pension. Where the pensioners are widows or dependent relatives, the lists should give the name and service of the soldier, with the time and cause of his death. This would bring the matter to the attention of the neighbors of pensioners, and there would be many complaints sent in to the Commissioner, calling attention to persons improperly pensioned. The Commissioner should heed these complaints when they appear to be well founded, and place the papers in the hands of special examiners for further investigation. The special examiner should be required, in such case, to visit the neighborhood where the pensioner lives; and if he has reason to believe that the claim is unjust he should be required to conduct a public examination into the facts, and report the evidence taken, together with his conclusions thereon, to the Commissioner. If the conclusions should be adverse to the claimant, and in the opinion of the Commissioner correct, he should drop the name of the pensioner from the roll, allowing him the right of appeal to the Secretary.

It is claimed by those who oppose a revision of the pension list that the saving accomplished would not equal the cost. In answer to that I will say that under General Black's administration of the Pension Office the saving effected by the special examination of cases amounted in a single year to more than one million and a half dollars over and above the costs of the force of special examiners in the field. The commission of experts should also examine the re-rated cases, many of which are known to have been increased in flagrant violation of law, and should reduce them to a proper basis. This alone would save many millions of dollars during the life of the pension list. I believe that a strict enforce-

ment of the present pension laws in the manner suggested would result in an annual saving of at least \$50,000,000. The reforms suggested, if adopted, would perhaps exhaust the power of the executive officers to revise the pension list, and any additional reforms must necessarily come through Congress.

Congress will not take any steps looking to pension reform, except under compulsion from the people. Pensions ought to be restricted to those who received wounds or incurred disabilities in the service. The Dependent Pension Act of June 27, 1890, ought to be repealed; and if it is not repealed it should be so modified that pensions would only be granted under it to those who are in a dependent condition, and unable to earn a support. The rich should not be pensioned as dependents, as many of them are under that act. Men who have disabilities of post-bellum origin and are able to earn a support without manual labor should not be permitted to become public charges. Excessive pensions should be reduced, and uniformity established, so that all pensioners of equal merit, with like disabilities, would stand on an equal footing. The 3,412 foreigners who are now on the pension rolls should be dropped.

Pensions should not be paid to those who owe no allegiance to the government, and who, at the command of their sovereigns or rulers, would be bound to take up arms against it. The great majority of them no doubt came to this country during the war as mercenaries, and enlisted for the pay and bounty, and when the war ended they returned to the service of their royal masters as a matter of preference. We have reached a point where a choice must be made between an honest revision of the pension list and the overthrow of the entire system. Deserving pensioners will support a just and honest pension policy. They have nothing to fear from such a policy. The undeserving will condemn it. Demagogues have prostituted the system for political purposes until patriotism demands that the line should be drawn between honor and dishonor, between the soldier and the bummer, between the patriot and the hireling, between the pension which evinces the gratitude of the Republic to its defenders and the pension which has been unworthily or dishonestly procured. We must purge the pension roll in order to make it a roll of honor.

B. A. ENLOE.